

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL STEVEN MAINS, U.S. ARMY, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED ALSO PRESENT: MAJOR TY MARTIN, U.S. ARMY, CENTER FOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED; PHIL ANDREWS, CENTER FOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 2008

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): I would just like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, July 23rd. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. I'll be moderating our call today.

So a note to the bloggers that are online right now -- please remember to clearly state your name and blogger organization that you're with in advance of your question.

With that, sir, I'm going to officially turn it over to you so you can introduce both yourself and then Major Ty Martin.

COL. MAINS: All right. Yeah, Major Ty Martin is with us. He is in the Integration Division and is one of the key guys that has been putting together the Lessons Learned Integration network, which is what we want to talk to you about. And I've got Mr. Phil Andrews, who is my public affairs officer.

Should we go around the horn, then, and kind of hear who else is the on the line?

LT. CRAGG Yes. There is Andrew Lubin and Chuck Simmins. Chuck Simmins will be first. Chuck, if you want to introduce yourself and go with your questions.

Q Colonel, my name is Chuck Simmins and I'm with America's North Shore Journal. Your network -- I'm looking at the blurb that came out with the e-mail here. Can you talk a little bit about once something is determined that it might be useful? The process that actually gets it into the system, how it's vetted, and then how it's spit back out as something that's going to go throughout the Army?

COL. MAINS: Absolutely. Let me talk a little bit about the system itself. What we've put together is a network of people that are supported by processes and technology. And those people are out at the -- at every unit, both deployed and not deployed, as well as all of the Army centers and schools. And I point out not just TRADOC centers and schools, you know, like the Armor School, the Infantry School, but we also have them at the JAG school, the AMED -

- the Army medical folks -- and we have them in with special operations. So it isn't just a TRADOC-wide network. It is truly an Army-wide network.

And what we do, each of those individuals, each of those analysts is responsible to keep his eyes open and talk to a lot of people at the command to which they're attached to collect up lessons that we're learning.

And it might be a new technique to do a particular mission or it might be a modification to a vehicle that everybody else in the Army should really know about, they collect those up.

And when we talk about vetting, there's kind of a hasty process and a deliberate process. And we're focused really on the hasty process, and that is that if the unit commander is using it in the field, if he is modifying his vehicles in a particular way because they didn't come from the factory exactly the way he needed them to fit the situation he has, then, as far as we're concerned, that's vetted.

And we'll put it out and we'll say this is one unit's solution. And we'll try to provide the context under which that solution was effective. And so then the next unit commander can pick it up, look at it, say my situation is close enough that I want to take this on or maybe this, you know, just doesn't fit my situation. And he can discard it.

The other function that those analysts perform is not just collectors, but they also push information; that because they're embedded in the organization, they are able to keep their finger on the pulse of what the organization needs. And you know, we all want the computer to spit out to us the information in a digestible form exactly when we need it. Well, computers just aren't able to do that. And so we have our analysts that fulfill that role. And they're constantly listening to what the commanders' issues are, what their needs are and reaching out to the rest of the network as well as our own archives to find things that the commander needs or the soldiers need, and then pushes those to them as they need them.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Chuck, did you have another follow-on question?

Q Yeah. Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

Q Colonel, your analysts, they're actually attached to a unit. What level unit are they being sent to? And are these analysts qualified in their fields? For example, if they're sent to a medical unit, are they medical personnel? If they're sent to a logistics unit, are they logistics specialists? COL. MAINS: Right, yeah, that's always a problem, getting the right person and getting him or her to the right place. And we've spent an awful lot of time making sure that that happens. We have people right now at division level, corps level, Multinational Force level, as well as separate brigades. And in certain circumstances we have them even down to the battalion level. We've got a TAC (sp) force in theater that has kind of a unique mission that we wanted to capture, so we've put a guy actually at the battalion level. We've got a new kind of brigade, the battlefield surveillance brigade, that has been newly fielded to Iraq. And so even though they're not a separate brigade, they're acting as part of a division. We put an analyst with them, as well.

Trying to get the right guy in the right position in the logistics community, I have to say that CASCOT, the Combined Arms Support Command, at Fort Lee has been very, very aggressive about getting the right people and making sure that we get them in the right position. For instance, right now one of our analysts is actually the sergeant major of the transportation school, and so we've got him looking at transportation issues in Kuwait and up to Balad, even, in Iraq. I mean, you just couldn't ask for a better fit than that.

Now, I won't say that every one of our fits are that good, but that's certainly our goal.

Q These folks are TDY to you, or is an assignment to your organization part of somebody's career path?

COL. MAINS: No. The folks that we have in theater are typically reservists. We have a mobilization TDA, Table of Distribution Allowances, that allows us to bring 20 reservists on to active duty for the sole purpose of deploying them into an active theater. And we've got them all around the world in active theaters, not just Iraq and Afghanistan. So we can bring 20 reservists on.

We also have the ability that if we find an active-duty member who is, you know, between assignments, or for some reason -- you know, in the case of the sergeant major, the transportation commandant said it was important enough to him to get the transportation lessons out of theater, that he would devote that resource to doing that.

So typically the guys that are deployed are reservists that we bring on with specific skills. The analysts that are at the non-deployed units -- and we're just hiring one for Korea and one for Germany but we cover all of the continental United States posts and Hawaii -- those are typically contractors.

And 9 out of 10 of those contractors are retired senior non-commissioned officers or officers, because we need to have somebody that has a feel, for what the unit really needs, and has the seniority and the maturity to make good decisions out on their own because, you know, I run an organization with over 50 branch offices. And those branch offices have to operate pretty autonomously.

Q Thank you, Colonel. We'll let Drew have his shot at a few questions.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Andrew, over to you.

Thanks, Chuck.

Q Yeah, gentlemen, good afternoon. This is Andrew Lubin. I write for U.S. Naval Institute's website, Get the Gouge.

To follow up on Chuck's question, if you have these analysts with the MNF-I, at the corps or at the brigade level, how do they get access to information in the field? Isn't this just extra layers of bureaucracy? Or are they just reading somebody else's After Action Reports? Wouldn't you want people down at the company level or less?

MAJ. MARTIN: Sir, we -- this is Major Martin.

For the ones in theater, when we send them over and attach them to a headquarters, they have a couple different purposes. It's not just to go out there and observe and collect the best lessons learned and TTPs. We always send them with a collection plan, to look at big Army issues or big Department of Defense issues, in some cases.

And you're right, in some cases, that analysts over there will attend a morning meeting or something. And there's a briefing or a slide pack or an AAR. And they take it and they send it back to us. And it's just that easy.

And they might pull it off the unit's web portal in theater. But a lot of times, what you get is very wide and very shallow. You might get an issue that, on a storyboard or a slide or an AAR report, has no depth to it.

So we could take it back and say, yeah, these are -- (inaudible) -- this is what happened; this is the key point. But when you come back to the units back here, when it's sent back through the network, back through the analysts at the division corps, at the schoolhouses and things like that, they need to know more.

They need to know not just what happened and where and when and the temperature that day. They need to know, well, why did the commander make that decision? Or why did this piece of equipment fail?

And those analysts forward can take the time and look at the AAR before they send it back and go, you know, there needs to be some more analysis.

I need to go ask this question. I need to anticipate that someone's going to want to see this and they're probably going to have these follow-up questions, so I'll go ahead and gather it now.

So they do more than just transfer data. It's not -- in some cases, it may appear to be another level of bureaucracy, but they go there and do more information-gathering, run down those rabbit holes and get that information and then they send it back.

And then part two of that is we also see other trends. We have units getting ready to deploy, and they will say: Hey, what's happening in that area? (Audio interference) -- and what's happening there? I'm going to go into this AO.

So that analyst forward will -- he just won't collect up the storyboards. He'll look at the trend analysis in theater for that AO and then he can send that back as well to help that unit in pre-deployment.

COL. MAINS: Yeah, let me add just two points to that. Having folks at all different levels also gives us a 360 degree view on an issue that -- you know, you might have an issue that somebody at the brigade level has reported. Because we have people at the levels above him, we can also say, well, this is -- you know, this is what they were thinking when they issued the order, you know, and this is the problem that it may have caused inadvertently. So having folks at different levels has been very, very critical in that way.

And we encourage the theater observers to get out as much as possible. You can't -- you can't get a feel for what's really going on from inside the

palace. And since I've been the director, we've given seven Combat Action Badges and a Purple Heart to our theater observers and -- just, you know, one measure of the fact that they do get out on the wire, they go on patrols with soldiers and take those issues back and try to look at the broad issues facing the soldiers, not necessarily what a single company is facing.

Q Okay, because that's what I didn't hear anybody talking about, you know, somebody going out there and talking to the company commander and getting out in the field. And my -- where I'm coming from on this, gentlemen, is I spent a lot of time in Ramadi. And some of the Marine majors -- actually, Major, one of your -- one of your counterparts spent a lot of time out at Hurricane Point. And then they pushed him out to the different FOBs out there and he's going out, you know, working with the young men and then coming back and reporting back to Lessons Learned directly in Quantico.

It just sounds like you're more strategic-oriented than tactical, or am I mischaracterizing?

COL. MAINS: Yeah, I think maybe we gave you the wrong impression on that. We are primarily tactically oriented, some operational, and you know, so that's why we have people. Now, one thing that -- or that's why we have people down to the separate brigades and the division level, and they actually -- commanders are very good about allowing them to get around and circulate and follow the issues that are really important.

And a new initiative that we're trying to get started with the 25th Infantry would actually place these analysts in every battalion and every brigade, in a network that is connected to our networks. And so as they're sharing information, we're getting that real time, and we're passing that to the follow-on unit that's going to come in behind 25th, as well as the units that are on the 25th's flank. And that will give us a lot more capability to get at what you're talking about.

You know, we see -- we see some issues and try to follow them across battalions and across brigades, but it's not the same as having somebody embedded.

Q Okay, great. Can you give us an example, and then I'll -- Chuck, I'll turn it back to you -- can you give us an example of something that's been changed as a result of one of your analysts?

COL. MAINS: Yes, go ahead.

MAJ. MARTIN: There -- it's Major Martin again. A really good example started about two years ago. It's a little lengthy example, but I'll sum it up real short for you. It's with biometrics in theater. About two years ago, we sent an analyst in the theater, a sergeant major Reservist from New Jersey, if memory serves correct, police officer. And while he was there, he had a collection planned. We sent him forth with the Iraqi Advisory Group to look at transition teams going into the future. He collected some information on that, but he was working -- he integrated into MNC-I staff and really got to know people. He's a very much hands-on person, very charismatic.

He started going out on patrols, and while he was on patrols, he noticed that the new biometrics devices, the HIIDE and the BAT that were being issued out, there was a lot of user problems. There were some technology

issues. It was fielded a little quicker than it should have been. Our soldiers didn't know how to use it.

They didn't trust it. Just a lot of different issues. Well, he took that, started working with the units who got issued it, started sending us back all the TTPs, lessons learned. We sent it back to the MI center, up to DAG-2 (sp). We got the information out where it needed to be at.

And he took that information. He went on patrols out in the Fallujah area, watched the Marine Corps use it. When it was starting to get fielded to initial fielding at the -- the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, I believe, started getting some pieces up at their level. He went and worked with interpreters with them, all within the realm of MNC-I and what he's allowed to do.

But he was so successful at it, from the soldier, "Private Snuffy," out there using it all the way up to briefing the MNC-I commanding general on what's good and what's bad about it, that he now works with us and DAG-2 to help field it and teach predeploying units going to Iraq and Afghanistan.

So it's just an example of how we grab hold of an issue or a trend, using this analyst forward, and he got into the network, sent all the stuff back here to CALL, which then filtered out to all the schools and centers and predeploying units, as well as Big Army, to really get his hands around an issue. And today that piece of equipment helps us defeat the enemy on a daily basis; and without his efforts, the Army would probably still be struggling with it.

Q How long did it take to get everything implemented, then?

MR. MARTIN: Well, as far as his work, he was doing it rather quickly. He had the first reports coming back within a week. But Big Army, on the other hand, you know, there's contracting issues, those issues well beyond CALL's ability to influence. So that took a few more months. But once we got the ball rolling and got all the key players in sync on it, probably, I would venture to say, within six months Big Army actually saw the potential and we were able to influence that, something that probably would have took up to two years.

It was an example of a piece of equipment being fielded that's a really good piece of equipment -- from my company command time over there, we were getting equipment fielded all the time, but sometimes you weren't quite sure what you were supposed to do with it. Sergeant Major Hambly (ph) was able to influence that process immediately and get everyone focused on a really great tool. Q Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: So, Chuck, do you have any follow-on questions?

Q Yeah. Yeah. This process was described as both hasty and deliberative. I want to go toward the deliberative side.

How are the lessons that you're learning making their way to the cadet in a classroom at West Point or an armor officer at the armor school, or even some -- the -- something somebody learns in basic? How are those lessons moving to -- out to the entire Army?

COL. MAINS: Right. Well, in a couple of different ways. I talked about kind of the hasty method where the analyst will walk around, and he knows what challenges people are facing, and he tries to push the information to them.

We also publish about 125 documents a year, everything from a couple of page articles up to, you know, pretty thick handbooks and newsletters. And we have a pretty wide distribution on those things, and we particularly focus on, you know, sergeants that are going through ANCOC, the sergeant major academy; the lieutenants at armor officer basic, the BOLC courses, because you're going to make the -- a big amount of impact with those junior leaders.

We wrote a handbook now a year and a half ago called "The First Hundred Days," and we wrote that specifically for soldiers. It's turned into a series of handbooks since then. But the first one we wrote was specifically for soldiers. We printed an extra-large run of those and sent them directly to basic training units, so that the soldier would get this handbook in his hands while he's learning his lessons at -- during training. And he understands, "Hey, these are the things that are going to keep me alive in combat. It's not just because my drill sergeant, you know, wants to run me around and see what I'm really made of. These are really important lessons I need to learn, not just kind of live through the training."

So we focus quite a bit on those levels.

LT. CRAGG: And --

Q Okay. Gentlemen, back to Andrew.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

Q With the Reservists you're sending over, do they have the expertise -- if they're -- now I guess with what's going on with Reservists, they spend a lot of time over there already, but people who haven't -- are they attuned enough and up to speed enough to be able to realize the difference and what's important and what they need to -- do they know what to look for? COL. MAINS: Well, you know, you're always going to have an issue of somebody who's there for the first time. I mean, it was a first time for everybody. But we do get a lot of -- a lot of folks. We actually turn down about 90 percent of the volunteers that come to us because they either don't have the requisite skills that we're looking for or maybe their interpersonal skills are not exactly right.

You have to have kind of the right guy to do this, because he's going to be moving in and around the headquarters but, you know, not an actual staff officer in the headquarters. So you kind of have to have the right guy. He's got to be able to interview people without making them feel like they're under the inquisition.

So, you know, we accept about 10 percent of our volunteers. And because they are volunteers we've had really very, very good success with them adapting to the situation.

What we've found a lot of times and we've kind of -- kind of been part of our marketing strategy with the 25th Infantry Division experiment that we intend to do this fall is that we have told Reserve and National Guard unit commanders who are slated to deploy in three or four years: Send a guy that you want to make your Lessons Learned experts when you go to the theater -- send him now. We'll put him into theater with 25th for a year. They'll get that experience and then they'll come back to you and be much more valuable in your training.

So, yeah, you know, everybody always has to, you now, get over being the new guy. But I think we've done all right with that.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Well, with that, we have about three more minutes for any last-minute questions before I turn it over to the colonel for any closing thoughts.

Q I just wanted to ask you if it was possible to get a sample Lessons Learned -- I know, Lieutenant, you sent out the biographies of these folks. I'm just wondering if it's possible to get a -- you know, something fairly innocuous, but in -- a sample of what it is we're talking about.

COL. MAINS: Sure. We can send out, you know, kind of a small sample of -- newsletter and a handbook, that sort of thing, so you can see what we do. I would say 98 percent of what we write is for official use only, not classified. So the only thing, of course, is, you know, don't quote it extensively or anything like that. You know, don't leave it laying on the bus. But sure, yeah, we could absolutely share some of those with you.

Q That would be great.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And if you do send it, I'll forward it to the two bloggers on the call, sir.

With that, we're pleased to have Colonel Mains and also Major Martin on the call. Sir, do either one of you want to close with any statement?

COL. MAINS: Well, I just appreciate the opportunity to kind of share what we're doing. It's unusual in the Army to build a network and really field it with the people, processes and technology. Oftentimes -- and the civilian world is guilty of this as well -- we will try to lay a technology on top of a unit or an organization and say, well, you know, if we do that, then they're going to have the ability to share a whole bunch of information. But all of those guys already have day jobs and it's hard for them to get into a new process, even if ultimately that is really going to help them. And so we appreciate the support that we have gotten at the DA and TRADOC level to field not only processes and technology, but the people as well. And that that's very critical. Without that, the system would fall apart.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

And Major, did you have anything you wanted to add?

MAJ. MARTIN: No, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And I know Phil -- I believe Phil Andrews, the PAO, is on the call, so I just want to make sure I don't leave him out.

MR. ANDREWS: No, thanks. That's fine.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, just wanted to make sure.

With that, thank you all for the questions and for attending today's Bloggers Roundtable. Today's program will be available online at the bloggers

link on DOD.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with source documents, such as the colonel's bio, audio file and print transcripts. Again, thank you, sir, Major Martin, everybody else, bloggers, for attending. This concludes today's blogger call. You can hang up at any time.

Thank you, sir.

COL. MAINS: Thank you.

MAJ. MARTIN: Thank you.

MR. ANDREWS: Thank you.

Q Gentlemen, thanks for the time today.

END.